

# Buying Recycled

## WHAT IS A RECYCLED PRODUCT?

A recycled product is a product that contains recycled material or has been remanufactured. What makes a product 'recycled' is debatable. Issues such as how much recycled content a product has and whether you count post consumer or post industrial material as recycled are not consistent. Many federal, state, and local mandates require the purchase of recycled products. Most of these mandates define recycled material and how much must be contained in a product for it to be considered recycled.

When making purchasing decisions for your company, it is best to find out from the manufacturer how much recycled material and what type of recycled material is used in the product. This information must satisfy your company's purchasing policies or mandated definitions.



The recycling symbol is not a guarantee that a product is made from recycled material. This symbol has been used to identify everything from collection containers to recyclability of a material. Make sure you understand the meaning of the symbol when it appears on a product you purchase.

## WHY BUY RECYCLED PRODUCTS

Recycled products are made from materials that would otherwise end up in a landfill or incinerator. Putting less in our landfills and incinerators result in cleaner air and water and saves resources and land. Buying recycled products has enormous benefits such as job creation and new market development. Studies have shown that recycling creates more jobs than waste disposal does. Buying recycled products stimulates markets for those materials that have been collected at the curb or local drop-off facility or that have been generated as waste at a business. You close the material loop by buying products made from these otherwise wasted materials.



## MYTHS AND MISCONCEPTIONS

Many products used every day are made from recycled materials. They perform equally to their virgin material counterparts. In fact, recycled products may even work better in some instances and cause less damage to the environment when produced.

**MYTH: Recycled products are hard to find.**

**TRUTH:** Availability and quality of recycled products are continuously improving. Suppliers and stores that you already do business with probably have recycled products in stock. All you need to do is ask for them. Often, just the process of asking spurs companies to look for recycled products to satisfy their customers' needs. Use directories such as the Michigan Manufactured Recycled Products directory and the Internet to find lists of recycled products that are on the market. Do not stop looking for a recycled item if you can not find it now. Six months from now, the recycled product you were looking for may appear on the market.



**MYTH: Recycled products cost more.**



**TRUTH:** When building a market, a new product will often cost more initially. Consider many of our electronic mainstays such as calculators, color televisions, personal computers, and cellular telephones. When they first appeared, prices were higher than you would expect to pay for a product that does even more now. Many recycled products have been around for years and the prices have come down. If you have not checked recycled product prices recently, check again. You may be pleasantly surprised.

**MYTH: Recycled is inferior.**

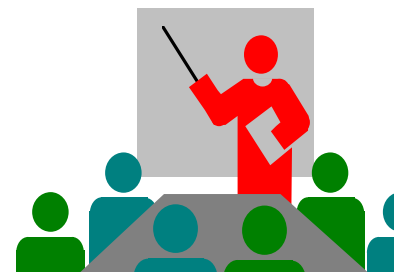
**TRUTH:** "Buyer beware" works for all purchases you make. Most recycled products that had a poor reputation in the past are no longer on the market because they did not perform adequately. As you would do with any new product, check it against your performance specifications, check references and compare prices. Recycled products often are equal to or better than their virgin material competitors. If you are unsure about the quality of a product, try it in a pilot phase and see how it works. This system works for any new product you may want to purchase whether it is recycled or not.



## HOW TO BUY RECYCLED PRODUCTS

Like most waste management strategies, whether it is waste reduction, pollution prevention or establishing a recycling program, you need to have a plan to succeed. Buying recycled also requires a plan. Consider the following steps:

1. **Start at the top.** Generate commitment in your company by getting management support.
  - Establish a purchasing policy to buy recycled.
  - Find a champion or set up a committee whose members represent all of the different areas that purchase and use materials in your company. The purchasing department may take the lead but do not forget the maintenance department, the print shop, the fleet area, and even your landscape contractor when looking for committee members. The people who use these products will have opinions on what to use, what specifications to meet, and what standards to set.



- Be prepared for resistance. The best armor is management support and hands-on proof that a product will perform up to specifications.

## 2. **Know what you buy.**



Survey purchasers to find out what is actually purchased by your company. What do you buy that is already recycled? What more can you buy that may contain recycled material? How much do you buy? If you do not already know how much and what your company purchases, this exercise may prove useful to adjust purchasing policies that will take advantage of bulk purchasing for better prices, quality, and timeliness in delivery.

## 3. **Learn about recycled alternatives.**

- Are there recycled alternatives available through your established purchasing channels?
- What recycled alternatives are there? This may require some research but recycled product directories and the Internet are a good start.

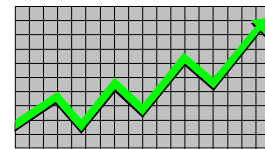
## 4. **Evaluate/Revise Specifications.**

- Look at discriminatory language that may eliminate recycled products. Remember; look at performance specifications not structural specifications. A recycled product may work as well or better in a situation where structural specifications cannot be met.
- Encourage the highest available post-consumer material content. But be realistic. If you ask for unattainable recycled content you may eliminate the possible purchase of a lower recycled content product.



## 5. **Set goals with deadlines.**

- This allows for quantification that motivates and shows progress
- Build upon your success.



## 6. **Shop around.**

- Consider bulk buying if it is feasible. Cooperative buying may also be a possibility.
- Look at product life when comparing price. Would buying a more expensive recycled plastic bench be less costly in the long run if you will not need to replace or maintain it as often as you do its virgin material counterpart? Are you buying for the long or short term?
- Consider disposal costs. If a product you buy can be recycled rather than disposed, how much does your savings or revenue offset the initial cost?
- Recycled products are being developed all the time. Network and stay informed about what is happening in the marketplace to get the best deal for your money and for the environment.
- Take calculated risks. You may be pleasantly surprised at the performance and price of recycled products.

## 7. **Work with vendors.**

- When vendors are aware of your needs, they will work to satisfy them.
- Let vendors see your commitment to buying recycled in writing. Convincing them that you are serious will encourage them to stock recycled products.



- Require proof of recycled content with products you buy.
  - Require service providers to use recycled products.
  - Proving recycled content is often difficult. Establish a trusting relationship with your vendors. Ask questions and check out claims.
  - Because recycled products come from an evolving technology, do not give up on an item because it is unavailable or does not meet your specifications at this time. Check it out again at a later date.
  - Prices of recycled products are sometimes more than their virgin content counterparts. The economics of scale and the fact that new technologies require up-front investment make this true of any new product. Buying more recycled products helps bring the cost down in the long run.
8. **Lead by example** and promote your program.
- Make sure vendors and clients know of your commitment to buying recycled.
  - Print corporate publications (business cards, annual reports, etc.) on recycled paper and make sure the material states it is recycled.
  - Include information about your buy-recycled policy in newsletters, company brochures, your annual report and other corporate material.
  - Keep your employees informed of your progress. Many initiatives start with a bang and are never heard of again. Encourage employees to buy recycled and tell them why it is good for them and good for business.
  - Create a simple slogan and campaign that can be carried through your publications and your employee communications. Remember to keep monitoring your accomplishments and talking about your successes.



## COMMON RECYCLED PRODUCTS

Many items purchased by businesses contain recycled content. Some are labeled, some are not. Many metal, glass and paper products contain some recycled materials. Here are some examples:

### TISSUE PRODUCTS

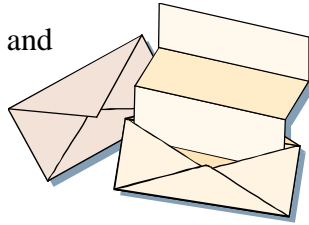
Toilet paper and facial tissue made from recycled paper meet consumer expectations and cost about the same as or less than their non-recycled counterparts\*

### PAPER TOWELS

Paper towels with recycled content are competitive in price and performance.\*

## WRITING PAPER & ENVELOPES

Top-quality recycled paper, envelopes and easy to find. Some “designer” look rough and unfinished but most the paper made directly from trees.



greeting cards are increasingly recycled stationery is meant to recycled paper looks just like

## RE-REFINED MOTOR OIL

Base oil used in many lubricants as well as motor oil is made from re-refined used oil

## CARPET

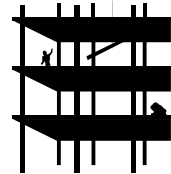
Pop bottle plastic (polyethylene terephthalate or PET) has been made into carpeting for several years. More styles are now available. Carpet backing often uses recycled polyurethane foam.

## CORRUGATED CARDBOARD

This material has been recycled and remanufactured for decades.

## CONSTRUCTION PRODUCTS

Many high-quality construction products, including drywall, paving, beams, and insulation, are available with recycled content.



\*Information adapted from 1995 Environmental Defense Fund publications.

Portions of this document were derived from the Buy Recycled Training manual, 5<sup>th</sup> Edition. Copyright 1997 by the Maryland Environmental Service and the United States Conference of Mayors.

The marketplace drives the manufacture of products, recycled or not. This holds the key to all of recycling. Without a market for the product, there is no economic reason to collect recyclables. Many environmental reasons can be promoted for recycling (saving resources, extending landfill life, less polluting in the environment). Without economic feasibility, these reasons alone will not satisfy the business environment. That is why it is important to buy recycled to stimulate markets, provide jobs and make more efficient use of our existing resources.